

Wednesday, October 21, 2009

To:

Senate Committee on Agriculture
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture

Re: Senate Concurrent Resolution 24

Dear Joint Committee Members,

I regret that I am unable to be here in person, but I welcome this opportunity to give input into your deliberations. It has been my privilege to serve the people of Michigan in the care and management of their natural resources, and in the protection of the quality of our lands and waters and assets for almost 50 years. For eight years (1975-1983) I served as the Director of the Department of Natural Resources and was appointed by, and served at the pleasure of the Natural Resources Commission. During those years, the environmental and natural resource functions of this state were combined into one Department. It is based on these years of experience that I express my opposition of Executive Order 45 issued by Governor Granholm as it is now written.

I commend Governor Granholm and Lt. Governor Cherry for their efforts and expressed intent to combine these two departments. It is my strongest belief that these functions do belong together in one Department under the policy direction of a citizen-based commission. However, as it currently exists, Executive Order 45 of 2009 is unexpectedly flawed by one item. The element I'm opposed to specifically are the modifications of the role of the Natural Resources Commission and the removal of their ability to appoint the Director of the Department. By giving the Governor appointment authority over the NRC, Executive Order 45 of 2009 severely erodes the principles of science-based management in favor of a more politically influenced Department.

Because of my opposition to Executive Order 45 of 2009 as currently written, it is my role here today to urge the passage of SCR 24. If, by resolution, the legislature may prevent the implementation of the governor's Executive Order, I suggest that we then proceed toward building a strong, frugal, and efficient new Department. We must have the perspective that we, the public of today, are the stewards of the state's natural resources. That stewardship is our responsibility so the public of tomorrow may enjoy these magnificent natural resources. However, the public must be able to work together with this new Department, not only with the goal of efficiency, but with a vision of building together the strongest and most effective Department possible. The Natural Resources Commission, a bi-partisan committee of the public, must retain its current authority in order to accomplish this vision.

Thank you for your time. I stand ready to assist in any way I can in the process of designing and implementing a new and stronger Department.

Sincerely,

Howard A. Tanner, PhD

Former Director, Michigan Department of Natural Resources (1975-1983)